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New Jersey Keeps Pace with Nation and Leads Tri-State Region in Performance on SATs

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The average scores of New Jersey high school students taking the SAT exams this year showed a three-point rise in mathematics, Commissioner of Education David C. Hespe announced today.

The three-point increase, coupled with level performance on the verbal section of the exam, means that New Jersey students posted the highest scores in the tri-state region, according to results released by the College Board, the organization that sponsors the test.

"I am impressed by our students' performance this year," Governor Christie Whitman said. "We are continuing to close the gap in our average scores compared with the national averages, which is truly impressive, given that we are also increasing the number and percentage of our students who take the test."

The percent of New Jersey high school graduates taking the SAT increased from 80 percent to 81 percent, tying it with Connecticut for first in the nation.

Commissioner Hespe praised local educators for providing encouragement and motivation for so many students to take the SATs. "Teachers and school administrators know that greater numbers of test-takers are likely to lower the overall scores," he said. "Yet, each year they demonstrate their commitment to broad student participation over selective encouragement of a smaller group of high achievers."

"Like most other states, our main focus in New Jersey is to increase student performance against our own carefully developed academic standards in multiple grade levels and assessed through a criterion referenced state test," the Commissioner explained. "However, I am pleased to see that this year's SAT results continue a trend of improvement while providing opportunities for more students to demonstrate that they are ready to continue their education after high school."

Since 1990, the average score on the mathematics exam has increased by 15 points - from 498 to 513, and is just one point less than the national average. Ten points of that increase were achieved since 1995. The gains in the verbal section of the test have been more modest, from 495 to 498 since 1990.

Commissioner Hespe noted that although some states have posted higher averages than New Jersey, the state leads the tri-state region that includes New York and Pennsylvania. New York average SAT scores are 506 math and 494 verbal. Pennsylvania's average scores are 497 math and 498 verbal.

There was more good news for New Jersey in the College Board's report, as Garden State students taking advanced placement exams had an average score of 3.26, the best in the region and second highest in the nation. Advanced placement exams are given to students who take college-level courses while attending high school.

In 2000, 24,997 students took advanced placement tests, a 4.7 percent increase from last year. Those students took 43,376 exams, a 6.2 percent increase from 1999, with 72 percent of the exams earning a passing grade for college-level credit.